

Message Text

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FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON AND PM
DIRECTOR GELB FROM AMBASSADOR PORTER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MASS, SA, XF
SUBJECT: ARMS SUPPLY TO ARAB STATES

1. THE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS TO PRESENT SOME THOUGHTS ON ARMS SUPPLY AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN GENERAL TO THE ARAB STATES OF THIS REGION, AND IN PARTICULAR ON THE PRESENT AND FUTURE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SAUDI ARABIA IN THAT MATTER. I BELIEVE IT TIMELY TO INTRODUCE A DISCUSSION OF THIS TOPIC BECAUSE OF THE IMPENDING VISIT OF SECRETARY VANCE, WHICH MIGHT OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE SOMEWHAT WIDER DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SAUDIS ON THE GENERAL SUBJECT OF SUPPLY OF DEFENSE ITEMS THAN HAVE BEEN CUSTOMARY IN THE PAST; AND, IN PARTICULAR, TO LOOK AT POSSIBILITIES OF AVOIDING IN FUTURE UNTIDY OPERATIONS LIKE JORDAN'S AIR DEFENSE PROBLEMS.

2. WE HAVE IN BEING A US/SAUDI JOINT SECURITY COMMISSION WHICH MEETS WHENEVER ONE OR THE OTHER OF ITS MEMBERS FEELS THAT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL (IT HAS NOT MET SINCE NOVEMBER 1974). THE COMMISSION, WHICH WAS CHAIRED BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS, HAS UP TO NOW

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SECRET

PAGE 02 JIDDA 00777 301032Z

FUNCTIONED WITHIN THE VERY NARROW FRAMEWORK OF US SUPPLY OF MILITARY ITEMS TO SAUDI ARABIA, CONCENTRATING ON SUCH MATTERS AS DELIVERIES, COST-OVERRUNS, PRICING OF NEW ITEMS, ETC. ITS PRESENT COMPOSITION IS PROBABLY NOT WELL ADAPTED FOR POLITICO-MILITARY DISCUSSIONS. HOWEVER, THE PRACTICE OF WORKING THROUGH THE SAUDIS FOR THE SUPPLY OF ITEMS TO THIRD PARTIES (YEMEN, JORDAN, EGYPT) SEEMS TO BE DEVELOPING ON AN AD HOC BASIS, AND

IN OUR VIEW THE TIME HAS ARRIVED FOR AN EXAMINATION OF THE POSSIBILITY OF PUTTING THE PROCESS ON A MORE ORDERLY AND BROADER BASIS, PERHAPS BY CHANGING THE NATURE OF THE COMMISSION, OR BY DEVELOPING A DIFFERENT MECHANISM.

3. WE ARE PROCEEDING FROM THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE US WILL CONTINUE TO AGREE TO WORK WITH AND THROUGH THE SAUDIS IN CONSIDERING DEFENSE PROGRAMS FOR OTHER COUNTRIES OF THIS REGION, PROVIDED OUR POLICY REQUIREMENTS ARE MET, AND PROVIDED ALSO THAT SAUDI ARABIA WILL FINANCE SUCH PROGRAMS IN WHOLE OR IN PART. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THIS PROCESS, IF CARRIED ON, WOULD ENHANCE SAUDI INFLUENCE THROUGHOUT THE PENINSULA AND BEYOND WHEREVER ARAB NATIONS SENSE A NEED FOR AMERICAN EQUIPMENT AND DESIRE TO REDUCE THEIR DEPENDENCE ON THE SOVIET UNION.

4. IS IT WISE FOR THE UNITED STATES TO ENVISAGE SUCH A RELATIONSHIP WITH SAUDI ARABIA? THE ANSWER SHOULD BE AFFIRMATIVE, WE THINK, IF IT IS ACCEPTED AS LIKELY THAT WE WILL HAVE MORE DEMANDS MADE ON US; IF WE WISH TO DEAL WITH MATTERS IN AN ORDERLY WAY; AND LAST, BUT NOT LEAST, IF WE WISH TO GIVE THE AMERICAN TAXPAYER A BREAK; WE HAVE A WEALTHY AND MODERATE PARTNER IN THIS COUNTRY AND, ONCE AGAIN, OTHER CONSIDERATIONS PERMITTING, WE SHOULD MOVE CLOSER TOGETHER FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT.

5. I AM NOT SUGGESTING THAT THIS MATTER OF CLOSER COORDINATION WITH THE SAG BE EXPLORED IN DEPTH DURING SECSTATE'S VISIT. SUCH A VISIT WOULD, HOWEVER, PROVIDE A SUITABLE SETTING FOR APPROACHING THE POSSIBILITY AND FOR EVOKING SOME SAUDI REACTION. IT COULD BE FURTHER EXPLORED DURING CROWN PRINCE FAHD'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 JIDDA 00777 301032Z

THERE ARE CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE MATTER WHICH MIGHT WELL APPEAL TO PRINCE FAHD, BUT THERE ARE OTHERS WHICH MIGHT NOT. FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE THE CROWN PRINCE AND CABINET MIGHT BE ATTRACTED BY THE PROSPECT OF CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED STATES PROVIDING FOR EARLY DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS AS THEY ARISE, THEY WILL BE CONSCIOUS THAT REACTION ELSEWHERE MIGHT JUDGE SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT AS IMPLYING A US/SAUDI EFFORT AT CONTROLLING THE FLOW OF ARMS INTO THE REGION, RATHER THAN AS ONE COORDINATING OUR OWN PROBLEMS IN THAT CONNECTION.

6. THE QUESTIONS WE SHOULD FACE INITIALLY SHOULD THUS BE CONDENSED AS FOLLOWS:

A. IS IT IN US INTEREST TO SOUND OUT SAUDI ARABIAN VIEWS ON A CONSULTATIVE MECHANISM WHICH COULD DEAL NOT ONLY WITH BILATERAL MATTERS PERTAINING TO THE SUPPLY AND FUNDING OF MILITARY ITEMS, BUT WITH MATTERS INVOLVING SUPPLY TO THIRD PARTIES AS WELL?

B. SHOULD THE PRESENT FUNCTIONS OF THE SECURITY COMMISSION BE BROADENED TO PERMIT INITIAL DISCUSSION OF SUCH QUESTIONS THERE IN RESPONSE TO THE INITIATIVE OF EITHER PARTY? OR SHOULD A

SEPARATE STANDING GROUP BE SEIZED OF SUCH MATTERS INITIALLY AND
AD REFERENDUM TO A HIGHER LEVEL GROUP?

C. IF THE DEPARTMENT BELIEVES THE SUBJECT SHOULD BE
DEVELOPED WITH THE SAUDIS IN ONE FORUM OR ANOTHER, SOME ADVANCE
INDICATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE SAG THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO
DISCUSS IT -- AND SECRETARY VANCE COULD RAISE THE SUBJECT
DURING HIS VISIT.
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